



Blowing the Trumpets (part 1)

Revelation 8

1. Prayers (verses 1-5)

2. Trumpets (verses 6-13)

As most all of you know, we have been working our way through the book of Revelation. We have come this morning to chapters 8, where we will read about the horrific trumpet judgments that will come upon the earth.

My message this morning is entitled, "Blowing the Trumpets (Part 1)." Now, before we begin, I think it's helpful to remind ourselves in the midst of Revelation 8, which is hard, judgement and condemnation and what God is doing upon the earth, we need to realize Revelation 1:3, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near." This book brings with it a promise of blessing. It comes to those who read it aloud. It comes to those who hear. It comes to those who submit to its teachings.

Nancy Guthrie writes in her commentary on Revelation,

Revelation ... was written to evoke worship, confidence, anticipation, and hope in those who heard it read to them. ... There's no blessing for those who hear it but choose to ignore it, reject it, rebel against it, or simply treat it as fodder for their curiosity. The blessing is for those whose lives are impacted and shaped by what is in it. It changed their priorities. It builds up their courage. It impacts how they spend their money. It leads them to worship in spirit and in truth. It sends them to their knees in prayer. It emboldens their witness. It takes away their fear of death. It fills their imagination and fuels their anticipation of where history is headed, and it shapes their understanding of how suffering will resolve in the new heaven and the new earth.^[1]

It's easy for us to forget this when we come to chapters like 8 and 9. Because they tell of such hard things that will come upon the earth. So before we dig into it, I wanted to remind you that there must be some blessing in these chapters.

So with that introduction, let's set the context of chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 1 was the introduction to the Revelation, which places John on the island of Patmos as a political prisoner, who is told to write what he sees (Revelation 1:10-11). Chapters 2 and 3 were filled with letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Chapters 4 and 5 gave us a glimpse of heaven, with God on the throne and Jesus as the Lamb, both receiving worship from the heavenly beings. In chapter 6, John saw the first six seals of the scroll being opened. In chapter 7, John saw the 144,000 people sealed, and the great multitude that comes out of the great tribulation.

And now, in chapters 8 and 9, we will see the trumpets being blown. They will bring some horrible things upon the earth. Forest fires and polluted seas and stars falling from the sky. Locusts and death. Many have compared the disasters of these chapters to the plagues that Egypt experienced in the days of Moses, but these are far larger, on the global scaled. But they have their lessons for us. And I trust, this morning, that they will bring a blessing to you.

So let's begin. Revelation, chapter 8, which begins the blowing of the trumpets.

Revelation 8

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter. The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

That's what happens when the angels blow the trumpets. These are the first four trumpets. The fifth and sixth trumpet occur in Revelation 9 (which we will look at next week). The context of these trumpets come in the first verse,

Revelation 8:1

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal,

Let's stop there. This brings us back to chapter 6, when the seals of the scroll in the hand of God were opened. We saw six of the seals opened. But now comes the seventh. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, the scroll was ready to be opened, and Verse 1 tells us, Revelation 8:1 there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. This comes in contrast to the loud worship of God in chapter 7. Look there in verse 9, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10). A great multitude with a loud voice would have been almost deafening! And then, here in chapter 8, we have silence. This is the calm before the storm. George Eldon Ladd in his commentary says, "The silence represents an attitude of trembling suspense on the part of the heavenly hosts in view of the judgments of God which are about to fall upon the world. It is the silence of dreadful anticipation of the events that are about to ensue"^[2] Thirty minutes! That's a long time. To get a sense, let's just try 30 seconds of silence. Then, after the 30 minutes of silence, John sees the events of verse 2,

Revelation 8:2

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

These are the trumpets that we have been talking about the past few weeks. Remember, the backbone of Revelation. The seals, trumpets and bowls. The seals are in Revelation 6. The trumpets are in Revelation 8-9 The bowls are in Revelation 16. Now, when we think trumpets, we are inclined to think this: The trumpet player, who plays a nice piece at the concert. But, when we think trumpets, it's better to think of this: The soldier calling his fellow soldiers off to battle. These trumpets are not to be sounded, that people might enjoy the nice music. No, these trumpets are sounded to gather the troops. Trumpets were often used like this in Bible times. They were sounded to gather the tribes before they broke camp while they in the wilderness (Numbers 10:2). They were sounded when Joshua called the army to fight against Jericho (Joshua 6). They were sounded by Gideon's men before they went to battle against the Mideonites (Judges 7). So likewise here, the sounding of the trumpet wasn't for a concert. it was to initiate the plagues that were to come upon the earth. These seven angels were given the seven trumpets to blow (verse 2). But before they blew them, another angel arrives on the scene:

Revelation 8:3-4

And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

This is my first point:

1. Prayers (verses 1-5)

This 8th angel came, with a censor in his hand, and took the incense given to him, and took the prayers of the saints, and offered them upon the altar. And with the incense, the prayers of the saints went "rose before God." I love the apocalyptic imagery here. As if our prayers to God can somehow be quantified, and measured and collected, and offered up to God, as if our prayers were incense. What a beautiful picture! But it is also the key that helps us to see the blessing of this terrible chapter. That God hears our prayers, That God collects our prayers.

In Psalm 56:8 we read, "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" There's the idea. In our pain and in our sorrow, when we cry and plead to the Lord, none of our prayers are wasted. God collects them. I think about all of the things that people may collect: Some collect baseball cards. Other collect stamps. Some collect coins. Others collect old magazines. God collects prayers of the saints. And here, in Revelation 8, they are pictured to be like incense, rising up before God.

Now, we don't know what prayers these are. Are these all of the prayers of all the saints for all time? Are they a specific type of prayer? Are they the unanswered prayers of the saints? Are they the cries for help? We don't know, but it makes sense in context of Revelation that it includes the prayers of the persecuted people of the first century church who are praying to God in light of the tribulation they were experiencing. It include cries of God's people for justice. Up to this point in the Revelation, we have seen much praise given to God. Chapters 4 and 5 are filled with the heavenly realm, where the angelic realm are giving praise to God! But we have only seen one prayer from people. It is found in Revelation, chapter 6. It is the prayers of the martyrs who are crying out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10). This is the only prayer up to this point and it's a prayer for vengeance. Certainly this was the common prayer of those in the early church who were experiencing persecution. I can only imagine the prayers of those in Smyrna, who were told that they were going to suffer, be thrown into prison, and tested for ten days, and experience tribulation. And God says to them, "be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:9-10). Certainly, there were prayers to God for help through their tribulation. Certainly, there were prayers to God, that he might take vengeance upon those who were persecuting them! And this is the right response, the Godly response in some regards to those who have been inflicted wrongly.

The scriptures are filled with these types of prayers. They're called imprecatory prayers. Many Psalms are imprecatory Psalms, where David, in the midst of his suffering, offered up prayers to God against his enemies for him to be vengeful against them. God is a just God, and He likes cries for justice. Prayers like David often prayed in the Psalms. Consider the following Psalms:

Psalm 69:24-25

Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake them.
May their camp be a desolation;

let no one dwell in their tents.

Psalm 109:9-13

May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow!
May his children wander about and beg,
seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!
May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!
Let there be none to extend kindness to him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!
May his posterity be cut off;
may his name be blotted out in the second generation.

These are the sorts of prayers that those who are persecuted and treated wrongly in this life can naturally pray. And we see, in Revelation 8 and 9, the answers to such prayer. "Vengeance is mine!" declares the Lord, and chapters 8 and 9 are God's vengeance coming upon the earth. Now we as Americans like to skip over those. But if you're Ukrainian, living on the eastern side of nation when the Russians have come in and killed your husband and raped your daughters, you will pray those prayers and it is right to pray those prayers. We don't pray those prayers because we're not persecuted. But we will see the judgment and vengeance pour out.

The Apostle Paul understood "Vengeance is mine declares the Lord." He wrote, "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds" (2 Timothy 4:14). And for those in the churches of Ephesus and Smyrna and Pergamum and Thyatira and Sardis and Philadelphia and Laodicea, the trumpet judgements would be a comforting word to them! That God will avenge! And when we come upon these chapter and shy away from them, and don't understand them, and don't like them, it's because we haven't face the onslaught of persecution in our lives. But that's what Revelation is all about! It's about God bringing about his justice, which would bring comfort to a persecuted people. And that's where Revelation comes to be a blessing to those who read and hear. These verses ought to be an encouragement for all of us to pray. God may not answer our prayers in our lifetime. But there will be a day when he will answer every prayer for justice.

Eugene Peterson give a great perspective: "When the seventh seal is opened, there is silence in heaven for about half an hour. A climax had been reached. While conflicts raged between good and evil, prayers went up from devout bands of first century Christian all over the Roman empire. Massive engines of persecution and scorn were ranged against them. They had neither weapons nor votes. They had little money and no prestige. Why didn't they have mental breakdowns? Why didn't they cut and run? They prayed."^[3] In verse 5, we see more of what the angel did.

Revelation 8:5

Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

It seems as if the prayer of the saints have given power to the fire on the altar. For from the fire comes "thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake." the judgment is about to begin!
and it begins with the blowing of the trumpets.

Revelation 8:6

Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

In verse 6, our focus shifts back again to the seven angels we saw in verse 2. This is the rest of the passage:

2. Trumpets (verses 6-13)

Chapter 8 records the blowing of the first four trumpets. Chapter 9 records the blowing of the fifth and sixth trumpets. Now, again, it's helpful for us to consider a bit of how these trumpets relate to the seals and the bowls. There are seven seals in Revelation. There are seven trumpets in Revelation. There are seven bowls in Revelation. Some understand these to take place consecutively: That is, the seals will happen first, and then the trumpets and then the bowls.

I believe that this is the most natural reading of Revelation. The seals come first, and then the trumpets and then the bowls. However, as I have mentioned, there are other solid, Biblical people who understand these judgments to take place concurrently: That is, the story of the future is told over and over again. That there is overlap. There is a retelling of the story, each with a slightly different angle. The seals deal with wars and famines and death. The trumpets deal with destruction upon the earth. The bowls deal with the wrath of God.

There are pros and cons to each view. And I don't know which view is correct. The first view seems to be the easy reading of Revelation. Especially Revelation 8:1, when the lamb opened the seventh seal, the the trumpets began. It seems really natural that it should be consecutive like that. The second view, with the seals, trumpets, and bowls, retelling the story of judgment again, sees how far the sixth seal takes the story. It takes the story to the conclusion, with the sun darkened and the stars falling to the earth and the sky vanishing and the mountains being removed (Revelation 6:12-14). Yet, with the trumpets, it seems as if the sun and the stars and the sky are still around. And after the trumpets leave their devastating work upon the earth, the chapters that follow don't seem to have nearly the devastation, if they follow after the trumpets. And, like I have told you, I'm not sure which view is correct.

There is mystery in the apocalyptic story. Perhaps we shouldn't even be asking these questions about timing. At any rate, the point is clear, especially this morning as we consider the trumpets. God is in control. He is the one who will take vengeance upon the earth. Did you notice who gave the trumpets to the angels?

Revelation 8:2

Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

We aren't told exactly who gave the trumpets to the angels, but they were given under the guidance and direction of the Lord. And it is he who is in control of what takes place when the trumpets are blown. So, let's look at what happens when the trumpets are blown. With the first trumpet, we see a third of the earth being burned up.

Revelation 8:7

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Fire and hail, mixed with blood comes down upon the earth. And we have a third of the earth! On fire! Ruined. This makes the forest fires that take place out west every year seem like campfires. This summer, the fires were in Canada, and the smoke affect us, hundreds of miles to the south. You can only imagine the effects that this will have upon the entire earth! But God is bringing his judgment upon the earth!

In recent days there has been a fire in Maui. It brought great devastation, but it was not anywhere close to a third of the island. Of the 727.2 square miles on the island, 2,170 acres of land were burned; (640 acres/mile; = 3.4 square miles have burned up). Only 0.4% of the island was burned. This means that the first trumpet brings destruction a hundred times more than what happened on Maui, upon the entire earth! The destruction is devastating! Certainly, there would be much loss of life. With the second trumpet, we see a third of the sea creatures die.

Revelation 8:8-9

The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Again, when the trumpet blows, something from heaven comes crashing to the earth. In this case, it was "something like a great mountain." Some huge mass came barreling into the earth. Destroying a third of the sea creatures. Sinking a third of the ships. I remember being at a lake one time when they were performing a "fish-kill." Something had happened to the aquatic life of the reservoir. So they drained it and planned to start over. And I remember the stink. Certainly, there would be a stink from the rotting flesh of everything in the sea. Certainly, there would be loss of life, with a third of the ships in the sea being destroyed. With the third trumpet, we see a third of the waters made bitter.

Revelation 8:10-11

The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

Again, we see something from heaven coming down and crashing into the earth. This time, it was "a great star" that was on fire. This star has a name, "Wormwood," which was grown in Israel during Bible times. It was a bitter tree, but not inherently poisonous. But here with the third trumpet, when mixed with water, it does become poisonous. It killed many people who drank the water. Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food, and give them poisonous water to drink (Jeremiah 9:15). With the fourth trumpet, we see a third of the heavenly lights are dimmed.

Revelation 8:12

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

This brings us into a darker world. Everything dimmed by a third. The sun at noon is not nearly so bright! The full moon is not nearly so bright! This brings us close to the sixth seal, where the sun is darkened and the moon becomes blood and the stars in the sky fall to the earth. Only it's interesting because this fourth trumpet doesn't even quite make it to what the sixth seal is and was. Unless the sixth seal comes and then the sun's restored and then it comes again, which could be. I am trying to throw these apocalyptic categories out there for you and I think it's intentionally ambiguous so we don't fixate upon them.

Now, at this point, we really need to ask ourselves, what of these four trumpets is apocalyptic? In other words, John writes to us what he saw. But, is that a picture or actual reality of the coming future. Is the burning of the earth a picture of the anarchy of the world? Are the ships sinking in the seas mere pictures of the trading that stops? Is the poison of the wormwood, a picture of bitterness in life. Are the darkened heavenly bodies pictures of the darkness that comes upon the earth because of sin? These are legitimate questions. There are many Bible-believing people who look into the Old Testament and find some symbolic parallels, which compel them to hold these things a mere pictures. But I see no reason why not to take the things at face value. God has created the world, and as a result of sin, we have ruined the world. So, with the trumpet judgments, God begins his work of de-creating the world. There are places in our nation where the cost of real-estate has become so high that it is economical to purchase a house, not for the house, but for the lot. The house is torn down, and a bigger, better house is built!

This is the story of Revelation. Our earth is a tear-down. There will be a day when the Creator will tear it down, only to build something bigger and better! A new heavens and a new earth! That comes about because of the work of Jesus! We ruined the world because of our sin. Jesus came and died for our sin, to bring creation back to where it should be. The message of Revelation is to trust in Jesus, who will protect you from the coming devastation (We will see them in Revelation 9). Remember Revelation 7. God seals and protects his people, that they survive the coming devastation. This is the message of Revelation. Come Lord Jesus! Do you want to avoid the judgment? Then trust in Jesus! He will forgive your sin! He will save you from the wrath to come! Because, it only gets worse. The first four trumpets merely affected the creation. But the next three trumpets will affect the people who dwell on the earth. And this is what we see in verse 13,

Revelation 8:13

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

It's only going to get worse. We see these angels and we see these locusts and we see these other angels that are released to kill a third of mankind. This is God taking vengeance upon the earth. It's not pretty, but we are rescued in Jesus, so trust in him.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 3, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 33-35.

[2] George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 122.

[3] Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John & the Praying Imagination* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 87.